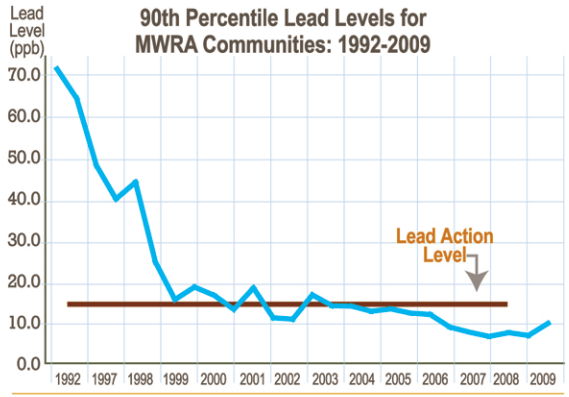
What is being done to control lead in drinking water?

MWRA and your local water department are concerned about lead in your drinking water. We have both an extensive testing program and have treated the water to make it less corrosive. Although most homes have very low levels of lead in their drinking water, some homes may still have lead levels above the EPA Action Level of 15 parts per billion (ppb).

To monitor lead levels, MWRA and your local water department test tap water in homes that are most likely to have lead. These homes are usually older homes that may have lead service lines or lead solder, and they must be tested after the water has been sitting overnight. The EPA rule requires that 90% of these worst case samples must have lead levels below the Action Level of 15 ppb.



MWRA treats your water to make it less corrosive, reducing the leaching of lead into drinking water. Starting in 1996, MWRA increased the pH and buffering capacity of the water and has steadily fine-tuned these levels since corrosion control treatment began.

Due to this treatment change, lead levels found in sample tests in tap water have dropped over 90% since 1996. The MWRA service area has been below the Lead Action Level since June 2004. Because lead levels in home plumbing can vary, individual communities may occasionally have higher test results.

Buying Faucets

Presently, the law allows many faucets to contain lead, even though they are labeled as "lead-free". New faucets meeting the NSF 61/9 "lead-free" standard will have NSF 61/9 stamped on the new faucet's cardboard box, but these faucets may still contain lead. Some faucet manufacturers produce plastic or new low-lead brass faucets that have virtually zero lead, but you have to check with the manufacturer.

For more information

Call us at 617-242-5323 or visit our website at www.mwra.com. To find out what else your community is doing about lead, such as home testing kits or a lead service line replacement program, please contact your local water department. For more information on reducing lead exposure around your home/building and the health effects of lead, visit EPA's website at www.epa.gov/lead or contact the state Department of Public Health at (800) 532-9571 (www.mass.gov/dph/clppp), or contact your local health care provider.

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
PWS ID#6000000
Building 39, First Avenue
Boston, MA 02129
617-242-5323

11/09
100,000

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority

Important Information About Lead in Drinking Water

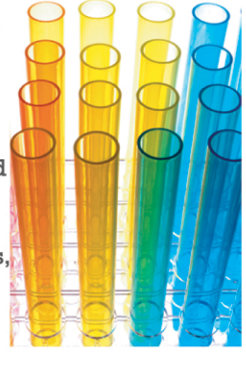
Why am I receiving this brochure?

Lead is a health concern and is commonly found in the environment; most commonly in lead based paint. Lead can also be found in tap water, though at much lower levels. While lead levels at the tap have dropped over 90% since 1992, and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) meets all state and federal requirements, your local water department found elevated levels of lead in drinking water in some homes.

Lead can cause serious health problems, especially for pregnant women and young children. Please read this information closely to see what you can do to reduce lead in your drinking water.

Health effects of lead

Lead can cause serious health problems if too much enters your body from drinking water or other sources. It can cause damage to the brain and kidneys, and can interfere with the production of red blood cells that carry oxygen to all parts of your body. The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, and pregnant women. Scientists have linked the effects of lead on the brain with lowered IQ in children. Adults with kidney problems and high blood pressure can be affected by low levels of lead more than healthy adults. Lead is stored in the bones, and it can be released later in life. During pregnancy, the child may receive lead from the mother's bones, which may affect brain development.



Sources of lead

Lead is a common metal found in the environment. Common sources of lead exposure are lead-based paint, household dust, soil, and some plumbing materials including many faucets. Lead can also be found in other household items such as pottery, make-up, toys, and even food. Lead paint was outlawed in 1978, but dust from homes that still have lead paint is the most common source of exposure to lead. Therefore, make sure to wash your children's hands and toys often as they can come into contact with dirt and dust containing lead.

The water provided by MWRA is lead-free when it leaves the reservoirs. MWRA and local distribution pipes that carry the water to your community are made mostly of iron and steel, and therefore do not add lead to water. However, lead can get into tap water through home service piping, lead solder used in plumbing, and some brass fixtures. Even though the use of lead solder was banned in the U.S. in 1986, it still might be present in older homes.

The corrosion or wearing away of these lead-based materials can add lead to tap water, particularly if water sits for a long time in the pipes before use. Therefore, water that has been sitting in household pipes for several hours, such as in the morning, or after returning from work or school, is more likely to contain lead. If high levels of lead are found in drinking water, water may contribute up to 20 percent of a person's exposure to lead. Infants who consume mostly formula mixed with water containing lead can receive up to 60 percent of their exposure from water.

Steps you can take to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water

Fresh water is better than stale: If your water has been sitting for several hours, run the water until it is consistently cold - usually about 15-30 seconds - before drinking or cooking with it. This flushes water which may contain lead from the pipes.

Use cold, fresh water for cooking and preparing baby formula: Do not cook with or drink water from the hot water tap. Lead dissolves more easily into hot water. Do not use water from the hot water tap to make baby formula.

Do not boil water to remove lead: Boiling water will not reduce lead.

Test your water for lead: The only way to determine the level of lead in drinking water in your home is to have the water tested by a state certified laboratory. The cost of the test is usually between $10 and $50. A list of labs is available on-line at www.mwra.com or you can call MWRA at 617-242-5323.

Test your child for lead: Contact your local health department or your local health care provider to find out how you can get your child tested. A blood lead level test is the only way to know if your child is being exposed to lead. For more information, contact DPH at www.mass.gov/dph/clppp or at (800) 532-9571.

Identify if your plumbing fixture contains lead: New brass faucets or other plumbing fixtures, including those labeled "lead-free", may contribute lead to drinking water. If you are concerned about lead in tap water, you should consider buying a low-lead or no-lead fixture. Contact NSF (see below) to learn more about lead-free faucets.

Consider using a filter: If your water contains lead, you may want to consider using a filter. Make sure the filter you are considering removes lead – not all filters do. Be sure to replace filters in accordance with manufacturer's instructions to protect water quality. Contact the National Sanitation Foundation at 1-800-NSF-8010 or www.nsf.org for more information on water filters. Also, if you are considering using bottled water, note that it may cost up to 1,000 times more than tap water. Simply flushing your tap, as described above, is usually a cheaper, equally effective alternative.